

*A
Journey
and
Its
Ending*



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A Journey and Its Ending

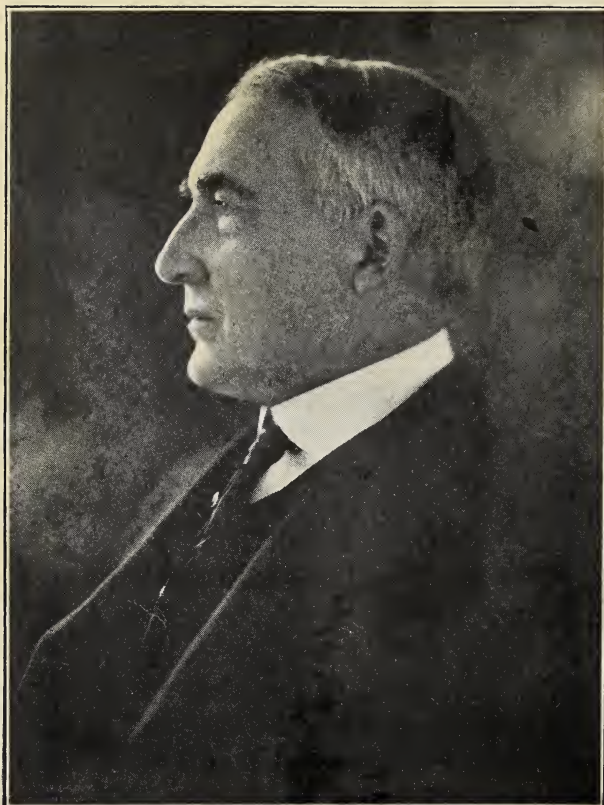
An address before the
Rotary Club, Columbus,
Ohio, September 11, 1923

by

Malcolm Jennings

To

*Compliments of O. A. MILLER
Columbus, Ohio, September 24th, 1923*



To Orlando A. Miller
With the greetings and good will of a
long time friend. M. M. Harding

The Alaska Trip



T was my privilege to accompany the Presidential party to Alaska this past summer, a trip wonderfully interesting and pleasant in its beginning and so tragic in its ending. Your chief has assumed that you might be interested in hearing me tell of it. I doubt his judgment but, as a loyal Rotarian, I am compelled to respond to the draft.

When the President invited me to go with him he said in his note, "I think you will get more fun out of it than I will, for it is no pleasure to travel as the President of the United States." Of course he was right about that. I should say at the beginning that this trip of the President and his party was no junket—no vacation tour. On the contrary, it was an official tour sanctioned and encouraged by the law. On the train a complete office was established, with radio connection. At every stop of an hour or more telephone connections with the train were made instantly. The same was true when we went aboard ship. Official mail was brought to us by train and airship and the President from first to last was always in touch with his official family and his official responsibilities. Three of his cabinet officers with members of their staffs were with him and everywhere we went they met and conferred with their department men in the field. In fact, Mrs. Jennings and myself were the only unofficial members of the party.

Neither was it a campaigning trip. The President was anxious that this should be made plain. A few weeks before we started I had written him a suggestion about the next campaign and in reply he wrote: "You may not believe me but I am giving no thought to 1924. If I make good nobody could beat me for the nomination if I want it; if I don't make good somebody should beat me." Not once on the trip did he discuss partisan matters and his meetings were all non-partisan and under non-partisan direction.

He had two main purposes in making this long and exhausting trip. The first was to carry to the country the developed views of the Administration and to give articulate expression to the fundamental policies worked out by him and his advisers.

The second was to give full recognition to American citizens resident in our territory of Alaska. Mr. Harding had long felt that Alaska had been made a sort of Cinderella in the American sisterhood. The territory had been a part of the United States for over fifty years but no President had set foot upon her soil. She had been governed at long range and seemingly with little understanding and sympathy. The President wanted to humanize the governmental relations and give evidence to the hardy Alaskan pioneers and their descendants of our fraternal regard, that we shared their hopes and dreams for the future and wanted to aid them now.

I have said that I was an obscure and unofficial member of an official party. Having nothing to do, I proceeded to do it. And yet to an old newspaper man there was no escaping the impressions of a journey made under such unusual conditions, and I hope you will pardon me if I digress to comment upon some of these.

We crossed the continent, passing over rivers and plains, mountains and valleys, through cities, towns, farmsteads and deserts. And wherever we went I found that, like Kipling's jungle folk, "We are one people." Environment makes local customs and even develops provincialities of speech and pronunciation. But so closely have we been brought together by modern methods of travel and communication that you can no longer pick out types as being, in dress or bearing, peculiar to localities or sections of our country. The war had a great deal to do with this wiping out of sectionalism and the "flivver" has done much more, as any one knows who has observed the automobile tags at camp sites everywhere.

I learned that the finest street in America was not "dear old Broadway," but "Main Street" in all our towns and villages.

I found that all the important midwestern and western cities had beaten Columbus in the realization of the necessity and value of a great convention hall—a great civic center which enables the people to hear all the great speakers and singers under the best auspices—and in inspiring numbers to entertain adequately great public gatherings.

I learned that stadiums are useless except for spectacle purposes unless equipped with amplifiers—and that they should be a permanent installation owned by the city or the university.

I saw enough to convince me that Henry Ford was right when he declared big cities to be illogical, uneconomic, unsanitary and necessarily practically insolvent. People live the fuller, richer, more natural lives in smaller communities—and they are better governed. There are no slums except in large cities and in mining camps.

I came to know the Mormons and to take off my hat to them. They have the best, most effective church organization in America. They are the best community builders. Their people are thrifty, industrious, moral, law-abiding and every healthy activity of mind and body is encouraged by them. The Church controls the beet sugar industry of America, has its hands in many forms of business, sways the political destinies of several states and is wisely, sanely conservative and sincerely patriotic. I hold no brief for their theological cult, however, and they are welcome to it. In theory and results it seems to work good and not evil and that is the best test so far as we non-Mormons are concerned.

Alaska is wonderful—its scenery is unapproachable. It has wealth untold in minerals, timber, coal, oil, etc. It has had a decrease in population, it is true, but it now for the first time has a stable population. The time has passed when the adventurer will find it possible to pan out a fortune in gold, squatting in any creek. The lawless camps are gone and Alaska is now as tame and as safe as Westerville. It faces a wonderful future. Much of the country along the coast has a climate superior to that of Columbus and never reaching our extremes. Railroads and high-

ways are building, new enterprises are starting; government regulation will restore the fisheries. It will never be a great agricultural country, but it can raise nearly everything its population will ever need. Reindeer and caribou are multiplying very rapidly, insuring a meat supply. Other countries in the same latitude having the same sort of climate and terrain support large and progressive populations. Alaska is all right and so are the fine Americans who are pioneering up there. I hope that they and theirs will inherit that part of the earth and its increase.

And now I want to talk to you about the man who was my host upon this trip. For thirty years it has been my good fortune to be intimately associated with Warren Harding. He had a genius for friendship; he followed the advice of Polonius—"The friends thou hast and their adoption tried—grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel." He was very reluctant to give up a friendship once formed. It has been said that he was promiscuous in his friendships. Perhaps that was true. He looked only for the best in a man and when he found it he tied to that. He did not ask or expect perfection. He formed his own judgments and they were always charitable. No friend could displace another in his regard. An attack upon a friend only made him rally to the defense. In this statement may be found the explanation of some of these friendships, of which many have been censorious.

Harding has been curiously underestimated by his countrymen until very recently. He was very generally described as a lovable man of fine character but not of brilliant mind or great intellectual gifts. And yet I never saw him in a group of men where his personality was not dominant nor where he did not measure up to the greatest present. As a boy he was a leader of his companions always. He was the foremost citizen in his community—the most far-seeing business man. He came to the Ohio Senate and became at once its leader. He went to the United States Senate and at once became one of the most effective forces in that body—respected by all, without regard to party, a peace-maker and leader. In his first term he was chosen to carry the

olive branch and standard under which two divisions of his party were to unite. And within his first term he was made the compromise choice of all the forces in his party and its standard bearer. Is that a record of mediocrity?

It has been truly said that the world is apt to accept a man at his self-advertised, personally proclaimed estimate. Harding was a poor self-advertiser. I never in all the years we were together heard him boast of a personal achievement.

I am not going to take up the accomplishments of his administration. They should be as well-known to you as to me. Warren Harding never wanted to be President of the United States. He had no lust for power, no belief in his being the possessor of great qualities as an administrator. He knew and proclaimed that he was no superman. He knew something of the vast powers and responsibilities of the office—the spiritual isolation that was enforced upon its occupant; the bitter, villifying campaigns connected with the election. He loved his place in the Senate, with the honors it carried, its dignified and important duties and its pleasant environments and associations. Political conditions forced him to permit the use of his name for the Presidency. Other conditions brought about his nomination, and I know personally that it brought him regret rather than exultation.

Nominated, he made the fight he was in duty bound to make, but he told me at the beginning that he would make the fight upon the issues involved, that he would fight fairly and decently, assailing the purpose and character of no man and doing nothing which he would have to regret or feel ashamed of ever after. He kept his word. He assailed no man, and by the same token he ignored every attack upon himself, leaving his vindication to come, as he said, from the people among whom he had lived all the days of his life.

After his election he came to feel that he had been called—a man, as he put it, of the moderate, average type, to lead by quiet methods and by sane, safe policies a distracted, war-shocked people back into the paths of peace.

How he succeeded, history must tell, when the sober judgment is reached in the orderly processes and perspective of time. But it must be said that he never faltered in heart or hope or courage or in the faith that all would be well with us under the constitution and the flag and under the Cross, which was truly to him a patriotic as well as a religious symbol.

And it was in that hope and faith that he undertook the journey which was to be his last. He wanted to help the people to visualize their government—not as an abstract thing, not as an unfeeling conscienceless machine—but as an agency set up by themselves and made up of men chosen by them and of the same human family—frail, as humanity is frail, but doing their best as God gave them to see what was best.

We left Washington on June 20 and the first speech was made the next day, to men some of whom are sitting about these tables, and he gave to you and to them a definition of Rotary which was really a statement of his code of fraternal citizenship.

From there we went on and you know, generally, the itinerary followed. What you cannot know is the wonderful outpouring of the American heart before this man of the people. It seemed as though they had just learned to appraise him as a patriot, a sincere lover of his kind, a brother to all men and women. Every city, village and hamlet gathered to greet him and to acclaim him. Every railway crossing held those who had come weary miles in the hope of a glimpse of him and the calling of a "Godspeed."

And Harding! Why you could fairly see his mind and heart expand under the cordiality and warmth of the greeting. It gave him a holy joy, but it did not minister to his personal pride. He repeatedly said, "This proves what I have contended all along. The heart of the American people is sound and their devotion to their government has not been undermined."

Time and again, in answer to pleas from places along the road, he got up early in the morning to greet their assembled populaces and in the same way he remained up until after midnight for a similar purpose.

I have seen him, seated at his luncheon, with governors and senators about, look ahead through the window and rush out upon the platform to wave at some old woman and a couple of children who had come across the fields to the track carrying little flags to wave at the train. The only time I saw him annoyed on the trip was on one of these occasions, when a tactless guest jokingly remarked, "You'll get no votes from that crowd; the old woman is too old and the children too young to vote next year." The President sharply replied, "I am not after votes next year. If that old lady and those children can walk a half mile through the hot sun to salute their President, the President should be gentleman enough to acknowledge the courtesy and return the salute."

Each day he gave himself more and more to the task which had become a delight to him. And the people were wonderful. They brought their gifts of bloom and fruit and hearty cheers. Nowhere from coast to coast was the President assailed by any discourteous or even partisan expression. And the papers, too, were fine in their kindly tributes to the personal character and attributes of the distinguished traveler. We went into the shop and factory districts, through the mining regions and among the homes of the foreign workers, and everywhere the same spirit was manifest.

If time permitted, I would like to give you some of the "human interest" incidents of the trip. I would like to tell you of the meeting in the great tabernacle at Salt Lake, where the meeting was presided over by the head of the Mormon church and where the invocation was made by a Methodist bishop and the benediction pronounced by an Episcopal bishop — of the Fourth of July celebration in Portland, where the officers and men of a British warship came ashore in their best uniforms and with their arms polished and glittering, marched in the parade and listened in polite silence to the reading of the Declaration of Independence — of the wonderful meeting at Tacoma, where thirty-five thousand people stood in the rain and listened to the President's speech and then remained an hour and a half in the downpour

until the Presidential party had boarded its ship which sailed past the stadium so close that we could hear them singing "God be with you till we meet again."

I could tell you of our experiences in Alaska, of the joy of the people that they had at last been given the recognition of a visit by their far-away government and the hopes that sprang from that visit.

I could tell you of the wonderful visit to Vancouver, and our magnificent reception under the Union Jack; of the great day at Seattle and the review of the mighty fleet of which we think too little and lightly; and then of the long trip over the Shasta Route to San Francisco. But I know the Rotary rules, and I have already exceeded my time.

When we were approaching Seward, in Alaska, I was standing on the bridge of the upper deck, with the President, Governor Scott Bone, of Alaska, and Secretary Hoover. Seward has a wonderful landlocked harbor shut in by tall mountains. It is very deep and would give shelter to all the vessels of our Navy. The entrance to the harbor is through a winding passage between two mountains rising almost sheer for several thousand feet, wooded at the base but rugged above and snow-capped. It was a wonderful sight. The President turned to Governor Bone and said, "Why, Scott, this is beautiful, marvelously beautiful. Say, you have been talking about naming a glacier or mountain for me. A glacier is cold and uninhabitable; a mountain is grand and imposing and awe-inspiring. But this is sheer beauty. If you are going to name anything for me why not this gateway?" "Fine," said Bone, "it's done right now." And so, by proclamation issued within an hour, that entrance became Harding Gateway to Resurrection Bay.

Well, at San Francisco we found another Harding Gateway to another Resurrection Bay and I am sure in my belief that that, too, was a passage of sheer beauty and tranquil peace.

I do not want to dwell upon the days at San Francisco—those days and nights of alternating fears and hopes, when all the world

sat in spirit by the bedside of our stricken chief and shared the watches with his gallant, devoted wife. As you know, the end came when we all thought that the battle had been won. I cannot understand, I cannot be reconciled that he should thus be called. But he went as he had often told me he hoped he could go when his call came—peacefully, painlessly, and without premonition.

Warren Harding was a powerful man of middle age, of strong constitution and clean life, moderate in all things. It would seem that under ordinary conditions he should have lived for many years. As to the cause of his death I must accept the verdict of the eminent physicians in attendance, but my own lay opinion is that, whatever the cause that stopped his heart and pulse, he died of exhaustion, due to his overwork of mind and body.

In the interest of truth of history, I want to state here from my personal knowledge, that at no time during his illness up to the very moment of his death, except when he was asleep, was he ever unconscious and not in full command of his faculties. While the attempt was made to keep his mind from official cares, there was not a day when he did not give direction to some public matter. I want in the same way to give the lie to the absurd and vicious story that he was the victim of a poison plot. There is not the shadow of a foundation for this canard.

I talked with him twice on the day of his death, the last time only two hours before he died. He was weak, but cheery, and said he felt that he was "out of the woods." But he said several times, "I am so tired, so tired."

Tired! Why, he had traveled ten thousand miles by train and boat and auto, in the heat of summer. In four days before he left Washington, he had written nine big speeches—and written them in longhand, with a lead pencil. In forty days he had made sixty-seven speeches. He had met hundreds of thousands of

people, shaken hands and greeted tens of thousands; he had conferred with governors, senators, congressmen, committees, studied reports and surveyed conditions. Tired! yes, tired to death.

But, as I have said, death came to him beautifully and found him happy. He had won, and knew he had won, the great heart of America. He had served God and country and his service was approved. It seems to me that his death was like that of Enoch who, the Bible tells us, "walked with God and was not for God took him."

And then we brought him home. And all along the way, in crowded cities, in towns and villages, and at the cross-roads, along the tracks in deserts and plains and mountains, the people came day and night and stood with bowed, bared heads and mournful faces to pay tribute to the leader who had loved them and whom they had learned to love.

I cannot tell you of this home-coming. It is too recent, too near to my heart and my emotions for me to talk of it. But everyone here knows the story.

And now Rotarians, Warren Harding has finished his work and signed his record. He is defenseless now if that record is assailed, except as his friends speak for him. You were his brothers; you knew him, and knowing him, loved him. Already men have sought to further their views or causes by putting words in his mouth which he never could have uttered—by ascribing to him views repugnant to his beliefs.

I plead with you to stand by his memory. He was a courageous man; he never dodged an issue and he never upheld in private the things that he did not indorse in public.

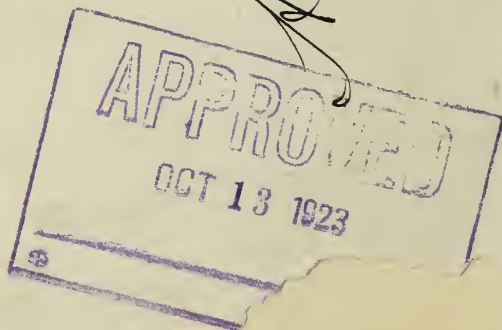
The record is in the hands and hearts of those who loved him. Shall we not stand by to protect his memory and his fame?

Marceline Jennings

O. A. MILLER

COLUMBUS, OHIO

Recd Oct 9/23



Hon. Heber J. Grant

Salt Lake City

Utah